



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

## Public Hearing Testimony

### Committee on Children

March 8, 2022



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**To:** Sen. Saud Anwar, Chair  
Rep. Liz Linehan, Chair  
Sen. Kevin Kelly, Ranking Member  
Rep. Anne Dauphinais, Ranking Member  
Distinguished Members of the Committee on Children

**From:** Vannessa Dorantes, Commissioner  
Department of Children and Families

**Re:** Raised SB 310 - An Act Requiring the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families to Submit a Report on Caseworker Retention and Permanency Outcomes

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The Department of Children and Families (DCF) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to share our comments regarding Raised SB 310 - An Act Requiring the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families to Submit a Report on Caseworker Retention and Permanency Outcomes.

This bill calls for the Department to post on a quarterly basis certain data regarding DCF social workers' employment, and the correlation between the number of employed social workers and times to permanency outcomes for children. Establishing timely permanency for children is paramount to ensure their physical, emotional and psychological well-being. We recognize the intent of this bill, but we do not believe it will yield an answer to the overall question of what factors negatively impact timely permanency for children.

DCF has undertaken many efforts to expedite permanency for children, which members from my Executive Team are here to discuss. The Department has experienced a 19.3% reduction in the number of children and youth in our care and custody since the beginning of the Lamont administration. During calendar year 2021, permanency was established for over 1,500 children, which included 570 children being reunified with their parents, 445 transfers of guardianship and over 500 adoptions. During the COVID-19 pandemic alone, over 1,100 children have been reunified. The quality of our permanency efforts is indicated by the success of the children and youth who have achieved permanency and the low rate of re-entry.

Timely permanency is impacted by many variables, including, but not limited to, the nature of the abuse and neglect allegations that led to DCF involvement; the nature of the parent-child

relationship; timeliness of parental access to community-based services; demonstrated progress during service utilization and rehabilitation; court availability to schedule hearings and trials; court rulings on filings of motions by attorneys representing the parents or child; changes in legal representation; court appointed evaluation results; and, recently, court closings during the pandemic.

While worker turnover on a specific case can be viewed as a factor impacting timely permanency, it is difficult to confirm a correlation between a particular worker transferring from a case assignment and permanency for a specific child(ren) being delayed. It is also important to point out that worker turnover on a particular case may be due to circumstances such as a worker receiving a promotion, transferring to a specialty unit within an office, resigning from the agency, retirement from state service or disciplinary reasons. Given contractual obligations under collective bargaining, workers are entitled to place themselves on the statewide transfer list and seek employment in another office which DCF is obligated to grant, based on seniority, when an opening arises.

The Department historically has had one of the lowest staff attrition rates in the country for child welfare agencies. This is confirmed by an analysis of National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) data from 2003-2015 showing that DCF was in the top 5 for lowest turnover of the 46 states for which data was provided.

We are not in agreement with the proposed legislation for the factors listed above, and note that implementation would require additional staffing and resources that are not currently supported in our budget.

We hope that this information helps to provide useful context surrounding this issue. We look forward to further discussing this bill.